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SUBJECT: BUNDESTAG LARGELY SUPPORTIVE OF U.S., P5+1 ON IRAN
POLICY

11. (U) SUMMARY: In a March 1 parliamentary debate on Iran policy, the four main German parties presented a relatively unified message in support of P5 1/UN efforts on Iran and making Iran responsible for the next steps. Speakers emphasized the clandestine nature of Iran's nuclear program, its violations of the NPT, and its drive for hegemony in the region. Several speakers praised the U.S. policy shift on an Iranian civilian nuclear program and the decision to attend the upcoming Iraq conference. While not entirely free of criticism towards the U.S., the debate is a welcome sign that the Bundestag's foreign policy heavy hitters are on the same page as their government (and us). END SUMMARY.

12. (U) In a March 1 parliamentary debate on Iran policy, four of the five German political parties expressed support for P5 1 efforts thus far. A bill introduced by the Left Party (which holds only 54 of the 614 total Bundestag seats) called for the government to forbid U.S. use of German air space or territory for staging a military attack against Iran, while also criticizing the implementation of any further sanctions by the UN against Iran. The other bill, introduced by the Greens, called for the government to continue EU-3 framework negotiations parallel to UNSCR 1737, to make clear to the US that military escalation would be harmful for international unity on the issue, to urge the US to offer Iran security guarantees and lift sanctions (as in the case of North Korea), and to increase dialogue with Iranian civil society and support of human rights. At the close of debate, both bills were forwarded to the Foreign Relations Committee.

13. (U) What could have turned into an anti-U.S. discussion, however, instead aimed the majority of criticism at Iran, as speakers emphasized the clandestine nature of Iran's nuclear program and its violations of the NPT and its drive for hegemony in the region. Foreign Relations Committee chair Ruprecht Polenz (CDU) emphasized that it is Iran that must make a decision whether to take the offer of cooperation or to continue down the path of self-isolation. Nonproliferation subcommittee member Rolf Muetzenich (SPD--also serves as German-Iran Parliamentary Friendship group chair) praised Secretary Rice for having done much recently to bring the process forward via diplomacy. Polenz, Muetzenich, and Green Party Foreign Policy Spokeswoman Kerstin Mueller criticized the Left Party for building paper tigers, unsettling the public with a "false debate" and for drawing false parallels to the international community's discussion on Iraq in 2002-03.

14. (U) Polenz, Muetzenich, and FDP MP Werner Hoyer praised

the U.S. policy shift on an Iranian civilian nuclear program (and European diplomacy's role in that shift), as well as the decision to attend the upcoming Iraq conference. Polenz also expressed hope that the U.S. would seek out discussion at the conference with Iran and Syria. Polenz cited a statement by General Pace that he categorically excludes an attack on Iran. All four politicians called for the continued application of the "double approach," offering negotiations while also instituting sanctions.

¶5. (U) Critique points towards the U.S. included Muetzenich reminding the U.S. that while Iranians may be against their regime, they also want respect for their nation and their successes. He added that Germany should remind the U.S. that the Iranian society is one with which diplomacy is possible. Mueller criticized "contradictory" signals from the U.S., calling them counterproductive and undermining the credibility of the entire negotiation process.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: In an environment where the media has been drumming up fears of imminent U.S. or Israeli military action towards Iran, the Left Party apparently formulated their bill to spark Bundestag debate on our refusal to rule out a military option on Iran. Instead, the other parties brought out their influential foreign policy voices to present a relatively unified message emphasizing support for P5 1/UN efforts on Iran and placing the responsibility for the next steps squarely on Iran's shoulders. While not entirely free of criticism towards the U.S., the debate is a welcome sign that the Bundestag's foreign policy heavy hitters are on the same page as their government (and us). As the debate was held after editorial deadlines last night, it may not receive the press coverage that could have been helpful with the German public.
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